

Soviet ABM Shift Denied

Reuters

MOSCOW, Feb. 17—The Soviet government was today reported basically hostile to a ban on anti-ballistic-missile systems as proposed by the United States.

Communist sources said Russia's opposition to a negotiated ABM moratorium was restated privately by officials this week after a Pravda article seemed to suggest that the Soviet view might have changed.

The officials were reliably quoted as saying there was no change in the Kremlin's position, and that basically Russia had no interest at present in negotiating a moratorium with the United States.

Communist sources said the explanation for the Pravda article was that the writer had made a mistake.

Pravda commentator Fyodor Burlatsky had been reprimanded and the newspaper would publish a new article setting out the Kremlin's negative views, the sources said.

The sources said Burlatsky's error had caused considerable embarrassment in high government circles.

Today's clarification by Communist officials confirms the Soviet position as well as the negative answer given at his London press conference

last week by Prime Minister Kosygin, who had been asked if the Soviet Union thought it possible to agree on a moratorium.

He replied that defensive weapons such as anti-missile missiles were designed to preserve human lives, and "appropriate conclusions" could be drawn from this answer.

The conclusion drawn by most observers was that Kosygin was rejecting President Johnson's call last month for a negotiated moratorium under which both nations would scrap plans for the building of costly anti-missile systems.

On Wednesday, after Kosygin's return from his British visit, Pravda published an article about arms control which quoted him as saying Russia was ready to discuss the curtailment of the arms race both in the field of offensive and defensive weapons.

The Communist Party newspaper's interpretation attracted widespread interest because it went considerably further than Kosygin's original answer.

[United States officials declined to accept the news reports from Moscow yesterday as a definite version of the Soviet position. They acknowledged that it was extremely rare for Communist sources in Moscow to challenge the accuracy of any report in Pravda, but they noted that there was no official authentication of a Pravda error.]

[Officials in Washington said it may be that the Soviet Union is opposed to talking about anti-missile missile systems alone. But they noted that Secretary of State Dean Rusk said on Feb. 9, after Soviet Premier Kosygin's comments on the subject, that the United States is prepared "to discuss both offensive and defensive weapons with the Soviet Union."]

[State Department spokesmen reiterated yesterday what Rusk said then, that they would not consider present interpretations of Soviet positions "as their last word on this subject."]

According to Washington reports last month, the Soviet Union had shown interest in discussing an anti-missile ban. But these reports lacked confirmation in Moscow, and were generally regarded here with skepticism.

Communist sources cited three possible reasons for Soviet opposition:

- Soviet military doctrine has always been based on a defensive outlook, and anti-missiles fit into such a concept.

- Russia is believed to have already started building a limited anti-missile system around Moscow, and work may be too far advanced for it to be halted.

- Soviet generals have a deep distrust of President Johnson because of the Vietnam war, and the military climate is against discussions of this nature with the United States.